

Best practice guide for institutions for a better SME support in the RES transition

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**Interreg
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1. Introduction

1. About the Energy Transition Project for SMEs



The [Interreg Danube SMEnergy project](#) focuses on the crucial role that institutions play in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to achieve sustainable energy goals and reduce their carbon footprint. SMEnergy aims to equip institutions with the knowledge, resources, and strategies necessary to guide SMEs in transitioning to renewable energy sources effectively.

Many energy-intensive SMEs struggle with the shift to renewable energy. For one, they face difficulties in identifying reliable suppliers and navigating the necessary steps, especially considering the varying supplier qualifications across the Danube region. In the midst of an energy crisis and increasing decarbonisation pressures, these businesses receive far too limited support. To address this gap, the project will establish a pilot network of regional service centers designed to assist SMEs in their renewable energy transition. This will include a tailored “energy transition roadmap”, adaptable to different levels of maturity. Through transnational collaboration, the project will create a Green Energy Knowledge, Operation, and Service Hub (GEKOS), which will provide institutions with a centralised, single-channel service platform, a cross-border database, and a marketplace to streamline support for SMEs. The ultimate goal is to develop national and transnational strategies, along with accessible toolkits, to enhance institutional capacity in supporting SMEs with renewable energy adoption. The project’s innovative aspect lies in its integration of comprehensive energy knowledge and a simplified service model, showcased through the partnership between energy agencies and business support organisations.

2. About the Best Practices for Energy Transition of SMEs Catalogue



This catalogue serves as an extensive guide for institutions aiming to adopt best practices to adapt to the energy transition. It offers a collection of proven strategies, case studies, and practical steps that institutions can use to support SMEs in enhancing energy efficiency and incorporating renewable energy sources into their business models.

3. Global Challenges and Opportunities in Energy Transition for Institutions



Institutions around the world encounter various challenges in supporting the energy transition, such as high initial costs, limited expertise, and complex regulatory landscapes. However, the global shift towards a greener economy also opens significant opportunities for institutions to drive innovation, provide support, and enable the integration of sustainable energy solutions.

2. Key Terms

Energy Transition: Energy transition refers to the process of shifting from traditional energy sources like fossil fuels to renewable energy sources – such as solar, wind, and bioenergy.

Institutions: Institutions, including government bodies, regulatory agencies, and business support organizations, play a vital role in facilitating the energy transition. They are responsible for shaping policy frameworks, providing funding and incentives, and offering guidance to help businesses, particularly SMEs, adopt sustainable energy practices. By promoting innovation, supporting the integration of renewable energy, and reducing administrative burdens, institutions are key drivers in accelerating the shift to a low-carbon economy.

SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises): SMEs are defined as businesses with fewer than 250 employees, an annual turnover not exceeding 50M EUR, or a balance sheet total of no more than 43M EUR. They play a critical role in the economy and are key to advancing the transition to sustainable energy solutions.

Sustainable Energy Practices: The Interreg Danube SMEnergy project's primary objective is to transition to renewable energy sources. Consequently, all energy efficiency measures outlined in this document are accompanied by the introduction of renewable energy. It is also recognised that non-consumed energy can play a role in achieving climate neutrality targets without the introduction of renewable energy sources.

The Danube Region: 14 countries across Central and Eastern Europe, is a focal point for transnational cooperation, especially in advancing sustainable energy practices and supporting the energy transition. The Interreg Danube Region Programme (DRP), funded by the European Union, empowers nations within the region to address shared challenges and capitalize on opportunities through innovative projects.

3. Models of Energy Transition and Related Projects

This section will explore various models to guide institutions and SMEs in transitioning from traditional energy sources to renewable energy. It will also showcase related projects that demonstrate the practical application of these models, highlighting their impact on sustainability, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction.

3.1 Best Practice - Pécs Chamber of Commerce (Hungary)

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The Pécs-Baranyai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PBKIK) supports local businesses, particularly SMEs, in navigating energy efficiency improvements and the transition to renewable energy. The Chamber acts as a facilitator between businesses and regulatory bodies, offering guidance on compliance, funding opportunities, and technological solutions for energy transition. Its mission includes fostering innovation and sustainability, helping companies access the necessary resources to achieve their green energy goals.

Implementation and Key Strategies

Collaboration

PBKIK has developed an efficient approach to help businesses transition to renewable energy through a combination of internal resources and external partnerships. The Chamber's primary focus is on providing general guidance and connecting businesses to the appropriate authorities or experts when needed. By partnering with local energy providers, government bodies, and academic institutions, PBKIK ensures that businesses have access to up-to-date information and energy-efficient solutions.

A key part of this strategy is the Chamber's ability to offer timely advice and link businesses to funding opportunities through EU and national programs. PBKIK also collaborates with local stakeholders to organize workshops and events that inform SMEs about the latest energy technologies and regulatory developments.

Additionally, PBKIK is part of a broader network of Chambers of Commerce across Hungary and internationally, which allows it to share best practices and bring innovations from other regions. This collaboration helps local businesses adopt successful strategies and technological advances tested in other areas.

Impact and Risk Management

PBKIK measures success through the tangible outcomes achieved by businesses receiving their support. Over the past few years, several local companies have secured substantial funding for green energy projects, such as solar panel and heat pump installations. In 2022, five businesses each received 10,000 EUR in grants, significantly reducing their operational costs and contributing to regional sustainability efforts.

The Chamber maintains long-term engagement with businesses, offering ongoing support to help them meet their energy transition goals. This follow-up process allows PBKIK to adjust its services based on feedback, ensuring that businesses are making progress and overcoming any challenges.

One significant challenge for PBKIK is its limited capacity to provide individualized assessments for every company. To mitigate this, the Chamber offers general advice and refers businesses to specialized experts for more in-depth analysis when needed. By staying adaptable and responsive to regulatory changes and emerging technologies, PBKIK ensures that its services remain relevant and effective.

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

PBKIK is heavily invested in building both internal and external capacity to support energy transition efforts. Chamber staff receive ongoing training on the latest developments in energy efficiency and renewable technologies, ensuring they are equipped to guide businesses through complex energy challenges. Additionally, PBKIK promotes peer-to-peer learning among SMEs through Sustainability Clubs, where companies exchange best practices and learn from each other.

Looking forward, PBKIK plans to expand its services by launching new initiatives to support businesses in their energy transition. This includes creating a standardized information package for SMEs, offering clear guidance on energy regulations, funding opportunities, and available technologies. The goal is to simplify the transition process and help businesses better understand their options.

The Chamber is also seeking partnerships with international organizations to bring in new innovations and best practices, ensuring that local businesses remain at the forefront of energy transition efforts.

Key Takeaways

Through its extensive work in supporting SMEs with energy transition, PBKIK has identified several key lessons:

1. **Collaboration is Key:** Partnering with local and international stakeholders ensures that businesses have access to the latest information and resources for their energy projects. Without these collaborations, the support system for SMEs would be far less effective.
2. **Tailored Support is Essential:** Each business has unique needs when it comes to energy transition. Tailoring advice based on the size, sector, and readiness of the company ensures that they receive the most relevant and impactful guidance.
3. **Adaptability Leads to Long-Term Success:** Staying flexible and responsive to changes in technology and regulation allows PBKIK to continually refine its services. This adaptability has proven crucial in maintaining the Chamber's relevance and effectiveness in an ever-changing energy landscape.
4. **Continuous Learning and Capacity Building:** Investing in training for staff and facilitating knowledge exchange between businesses is vital for long-term sustainability. PBKIK's focus on building internal capacity ensures that it remains a valuable resource for businesses throughout their energy transition journey.

By integrating these lessons into its ongoing and future strategies, PBKIK is well-positioned to continue playing a crucial role in helping local businesses achieve their sustainability and energy efficiency goals.

3.2 Best Practice 2 - Austria

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The klimaaktiv initiative, established by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment,

klimaaktiv



Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology (BMK), promotes measures to enhance energy efficiency and decarbonization across various sectors, with a strong emphasis on buildings. The initiative's goal is to support Austria's path to achieving climate neutrality by 2040. A key focus of klimaaktiv lies in its building standards, which provide clear and ambitious criteria for sustainable construction and renovation. These standards aim to minimize building energy consumption, promote renewable energy use, and improve carbon footprints.

klimaaktiv offers extensive support to companies, planners, architects, and developers through guidelines for knowledge exchange. Additionally, it acts as a hub connecting public and private stakeholders to drive the transformation of the building sector toward greater sustainability.

Implementation and Key Strategies

1. Building Standards as a Core Strategy

The klimaaktiv building standards are a proven tool for promoting sustainable construction and renovation. These standards focus on three main areas:

- **Energy Efficiency:** Setting maximum limits for heating demand and overall energy consumption.
- **Ecological Quality:** Encouraging the use of sustainable building materials and resource efficiency.
- **Comfort and Health:** Ensuring high indoor air quality, daylight access, and overall comfort.

The standards are divided into three categories: klimaaktiv Silver, Gold, and Platinum, which represent increasing levels of ambition.

2. Advisory Services and Support

klimaaktiv provides a wide range of advisory services, including:

- **Free energy consulting** for construction and renovation projects.
Tools and calculators, such as the klimaaktiv building check, which evaluates a building's energy efficiency.
- **Quality certifications** that serve as an incentive for developers and planners to align their projects with the highest sustainability standards.

3. Collaboration and Networks

klimaaktiv collaborates closely with regional energy agencies, professional associations, construction companies, and municipalities to disseminate the standards broadly. Strategic partnerships leverage synergies and increase acceptance of sustainable building practices.

An example includes training programs for architects and construction managers, ensuring that professionals are equipped to implement the klimaaktiv standards.

4. Funding and Financial Incentives

The initiative integrates its standards into existing funding programs. Buildings meeting klimaaktiv criteria are eligible for enhanced financial incentives, lowering investment barriers and motivating stakeholders to adopt ambitious sustainable practices.

Impact and Risk Management

1. Impact of the Building Standards

The klimaaktiv building standards have driven significant progress: over 1,000 buildings in Austria have been certified according to klimaaktiv criteria. Heating energy demand has been reduced by an average of 40% compared to conventional standards. Encouragement of innovative projects, including passive houses, plus-energy buildings, and neighborhood-scale solutions.

2. Risk Management and Challenges

Key challenges include implementing the standards in smaller projects or rural areas, where expertise and financial resources may be limited.

Solutions: klimaaktiv offers tailored programs for rural municipalities and smaller-scale projects, supported by regional representatives to ensure effective local implementation.

Key Takeaways

- **Clear Standards Provide Direction:** The klimaaktiv building standards set ambitious yet achievable targets, offering stakeholders a clear roadmap for sustainable construction.
- **Incentives and Support Enhance Adoption:** Financial incentives and advisory services lower barriers and make sustainable practices more attractive to developers and builders.
- **Collaboration is Essential:** Close cooperation with local and national partners has ensured the broad implementation and success of the initiative.
- **Continuous Improvement Ensures Long-Term Success:** By integrating new technologies and methods, klimaaktiv remains a dynamic instrument for promoting sustainable building practices.

Through these measures, klimaaktiv has become a model for advancing sustainable construction and a key driver of Austria's energy transition. By focusing on innovative building standards, the initiative significantly contributes to achieving the country's climate and energy goals.

3.3 Best Practice 3 - Austria

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

E-Control, established in 2001, is Austria's regulatory authority for electricity and natural gas markets. Its primary mission is to ensure a secure, efficient, and competitive energy supply, benefiting both consumers and businesses. For companies, E-Control offers a range of services aimed at enhancing market transparency, facilitating fair competition, and providing guidance on regulatory compliance.

A notable best practice is E-Control's "Tarifkalkulator" (Tariff Calculator), an online tool that enables businesses to compare electricity and gas tariffs across various suppliers. This transparency empowers companies to make informed decisions, optimize energy costs, and select suppliers that best meet their operational needs.

**E-CONTROL**

Implementation and Key Strategies

1. Market Transparency and Information Dissemination

Tariff Calculator: E-Control provides an online platform where businesses can compare current electricity and gas tariffs, fostering a competitive market environment.

Market Reports: Regular publications offer insights into market developments, price trends, and regulatory changes, assisting companies in strategic planning.

2. Regulatory Guidance and Compliance Support

Consultation Services: E-Control offers advisory services to help businesses understand and comply with energy regulations, ensuring adherence to legal standards.

Workshops and Seminars: Educational events are organized to inform companies about regulatory updates, energy efficiency measures, and best practices in energy management.

3. Dispute Resolution and Consumer Protection

Mediation Services: E-Control acts as a mediator in disputes between energy suppliers and consumers, including businesses, promoting fair and equitable resolutions.

Complaint Handling: A structured process is in place for companies to file complaints regarding energy services, ensuring issues are addressed promptly and effectively.

4. Promotion of Energy Efficiency and Sustainability

Energy Efficiency Programs: Initiatives are launched to encourage businesses to adopt energy-efficient technologies and practices, contributing to sustainability goals.

Renewable Energy Support: E-Control provides information and support for companies interested in integrating renewable energy sources into their operations.

Impact and Risk Management

1. Tangible Benefits for Businesses

E-Control's initiatives have delivered measurable benefits:

Cost Savings: Businesses using the Tariff Calculator report significant reductions in energy expenses by switching to more competitive suppliers.

Simplified Compliance: Companies benefit from clear guidance and streamlined regulatory processes, reducing administrative burdens.

2. Risk Management

Challenges include ensuring accessibility and awareness of E-Control's services, particularly for smaller businesses or those in rural areas.

Solution: E-Control actively promotes its tools and services through regional outreach and digital campaigns to ensure that all businesses, regardless of size or location, can benefit.

Key Takeaways

Market Transparency Drives Competition: Tools like the Tariff Calculator enhance market visibility, allowing businesses to choose cost-effective energy suppliers and fostering a healthy competitive landscape.

- **Regulatory Support Simplifies Compliance:** E-Control's guidance and resources help businesses efficiently navigate complex energy regulations.
- **Fairness Builds Trust:** Dispute resolution and advocacy mechanisms ensure businesses are treated fairly, reinforcing confidence in the energy market.
- **Sustainability as a Business Advantage:** By promoting energy efficiency and renewables, E-Control helps businesses reduce costs and align with Austria's sustainability goals.

By combining transparency, regulatory expertise, and sustainability initiatives, E-Control exemplifies a robust best practice in empowering Austrian businesses to thrive in a competitive and sustainable energy market.

3.4 Best Practice 4 - Germany

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The Initiative for Energy Efficiency Networks (iEEN) is an action alliance between the German Federal government and 22 associations (predominantly state governments). The alliance's primary goal is to establish small networks of businesses that work together to improve energy efficiency and reduce CO₂ emissions. Since 2014, approximately 430 networks consisting of between 5-15 businesses have been established. The networks promote knowledge sharing thus making visible the hidden value in improving energy efficiency. The Bavarian energy efficiency Network Initiative (BEENi) is the state level implementation of the program.

Implementation and Key Strategies

How Does it Work?

Networks are established for at least a 2 year period and consist of between 5 to 15 businesses. A network moderator coordinates the activities of the network, engaging businesses, organising meetings and networking events, and maintaining the motivation of participants. Each network is assigned a certified energy consultant who works with the individual firms. Following an initial consultation, each firm sets their own energy (MW/yr) and CO₂ (t) savings target. The targets of the individual firms are then aggregated and constitute the network's energy and CO₂ savings goal. Targets are non-binding but act as a mechanism for network collaboration. Businesses meet at least twice per year to share experiences and receive external input from experts throughout the lifetime of the program. At the end of the network's term, the success of the network is assessed by an external auditor and published alongside the results of other networks.

Who can take part and what are the costs?

Any firm can enrol regardless of their size or industry. To date, 63% of the participants have been large enterprises and 75% have energy costs exceeding 500.000 EUR/yr. Firms from the chemical manufacturing, food manufacturing, and mechanical engineering industries represent the top three industries involved in the program. Networks take different forms (models) depending on the participants in the network. For SMEs specifically, whose energy costs do not exceed 80.000 EUR/yr, 10 businesses form a network, the minimum running time is 2.5 years, and at least three

days of energy consultations are recommended. It is free to register in the initiative. Based on a survey of participants, the estimated yearly cost of involvement is between 1500 EUR/yr & 2500 EUR/yr (including costs related to: services supplied by the network, travel costs, etc.) plus a one off cost for an energy audit which is subsidised by the German federal government.

Impact and Risk

Many positive stories and feedback from participants speak for the success of the initiative. On average each network has implemented 41 energy efficiency measures, saved 31 MW of final energy consumption, and reduced CO₂ emissions by 12,000 t/yr since the beginning of the program. 85% of firms involved in the initiative have achieved their energy and CO₂ reduction targets and 88% rate the program a success.

There is minimal risk to a business for taking part in the program as they are not obliged to achieve their energy targets nor do they have to implement the energy efficiency measures. Additionally, 80% of the consultation costs are subsidised and companies enrolled in the initiative are eligible to receive additional federal subsidies (on top of those available to all businesses) for any improvements undertaken as part of the program.

Key Takeaways

The proven success of iEEN highlights the benefits of a collaborative approach to achieving energy savings targets. While energy communities can reduce the costs of investment, through knowledge transfer and support, energy efficiency networks can make visible the hidden value in improving energy efficiency.

3.5 Best Practice 5 - Germany

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The Bavarian Energy Days (BED) promotes awareness and participation in the energy transition via a variety of local events occurring throughout the State of Bavaria over a one-week period in September. The initiative has been held every year since 2020.

<https://www.stmwi.bayern.de/energie/team-energiewende-bayern/bayerische-energietage/>

What is it, how does it work, and who can take part?

BED addresses the pressing issues of climate change and the energy transition and aims to increase public awareness and participation in renewable energy initiatives. The initiative's motto, "Energy transition. Here. Now.", emphasizes the urgency of local action in the fight against climate change. The event is organised by the Bavarian government with the aim of building social acceptance and to increase participation in the energy transition. The initiative calls for collaborative action from all sectors of society, including individuals, schools, businesses, and government institutions at all levels.

During the event, numerous stakeholders - including municipalities, businesses, research institutions and other non-profit organisations – open their doors, hold workshops, and organise interactive learning sessions that enable participants to actively learn about the energy transition. Anyone can hold an event, and anyone can participate in an event – students, teachers, municipalities, businesses, etc. All events are free of charge and support is provided by the event organisers to help organise and promote an action.

Impact and Risks

In 2024, over 240 dedicated events were registered, attracting a diverse audience. Surveys show an increase in awareness of renewable energy and climate issues among participants, demonstrating a successful participation strategy. All events are free of charge and businesses receive no compensation for holding events. The aim is to familiarise society (including SMEs) with the advantages of renewable energies and reducing reliance on non-renewable resources.

Applicability for SMEs: BED serves two purposes for SMEs: On the one hand, it gives SMEs an opportunity to learn about various aspects of the energy transition. Business representatives can visit and speak with other businesses or government representatives to exchange knowledge and opinions thus raising interest and reducing risk in green energy improvements. On the other hand, businesses get the opportunity to showcase the initiatives they are implementing, thereby building their social profile.

Applicability for other regions: BED serves as a model for other regions, demonstrating the effectiveness of public participation in energy transition efforts. Key success factors include strong government support and cross-sector collaboration. Regions confronting similar climate challenges can adapt elements of this initiative to their local contexts, enhancing public engagement in sustainability and renewable energy projects.

Key Takeaways

The Bavarian Energy Days play a crucial role in engaging citizens and stakeholders about the energy transition and climate protection initiatives. Through a range of interactive events—including workshops, discussions, and guided tours—the initiative raises public awareness about the importance and benefits of the energy transition. This hands-on, participatory approach allows participants to not only learn about the energy transition and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward sustainable practices.

The initiative also strengthens collaboration across municipalities, companies, and institutions by creating platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and the sharing of best practices. This networking helps stakeholders align on new technologies and approaches, promoting trust and acceptance of innovations in renewable energy. By encouraging open communication and sustained commitment, the Bavarian Energy Days contribute significantly to advancing the region's energy transition goals.

3.6 Best Practice 6 - Slovenia

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The Renewable Energy Contact Points in Slovenia aim to accelerate the adoption of renewable energy technologies and improve energy efficiency. Since their establishment, these centers have simplified the process for consumers to install and use renewable energy sources by removing legal and administrative barriers.

The contact points were established by Borzen, the operator of the Slovenian electricity market, under the supervision of ministries. There are currently thirty (number is encasing) contact points located across six Slovenian cities. Contact point is managed mostly by local energy agencies and monitored by Borzen.

Implementation and Key Strategies

Collaboration

Borzen has launched, initially, sixteen advisory offices ("RES contact point") across fifteen Slovenian towns to promote the use of renewable energy sources. The number of contact points has now increased to thirty. These offices offer free expert advice to investors interested in devices for generating or storing electrical energy from renewable sources. They provide guidance on project implementation and assist in obtaining necessary consents and permits.

The mission of RES contact points is to promote and facilitate the adoption of renewable energy by providing comprehensive support to investors in renewable energy projects.

These offices offer free expert advice to investors interested in devices for generating or storing electrical energy from renewable sources. They provide:

1. guidance on project implementation and
2. assist in obtaining necessary consents and permits
3. and accessing support programs designed to encourage renewable energy investments

For those seeking assistance, the contact point's web portal serves as the entry point, listing:

- office locations
- working hours, and
- other relevant information for planning projects involving renewable energy sources (best practices, technological information, etc.)

Whether your project is in progress or facing delays, advisors are available to help navigate essential procedures and expedite project timelines.

LEASP is a subcontractor of Borzen, representing the contact point with 2 colleagues. There are also 6 other energy agencies throughout Slovenia acting as contact points.

The service offices can be contacted by anyone with RES-investment intention.

Main target groups:

- residents (private individuals)
- public companies
- SMEs

Impact and Risk Management

The RES contact point has been operational since the implementation of the relevant regulations in April 2022, following the "Uredba o določitvi nalog kontaktne točke za spodbujanje rabe obnovljivih virov energije" (Regulation on the tasks of the contact point for promoting the use of renewable energy sources).

However, in Spodnje Podravje, the contact point officially started running in June 2024.

Tangible results expected:

- more investments and implementation of RES in the industry, namely an increase in the number of renewable energy projects initiated and renewable energy projects completed
- improved efficiency in obtaining necessary permits
- and greater investor confidence in the renewable energy sector in Slovenia.
- the contact points should contribute to a more transparent and predictable regulatory environment

KPI of the results:

- First exact numbers are expected to be reported in following months.
- in 2024 (first implementation phase of the best practice): the number of supports offered through all the contact points in Slovenia. The minimum number that needs to be achieved is 1400 counselling sessions offered.
- 60% of them (of the 1400) shall decide on investment - that would be a good number
- Later expected: an increase in the number of renewable energy projects initiated and completed

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

Human resources:

- Around and total 40 energy experts work in the 16 contact points, i.e. in the front office.
- It is difficult to assess the need for back-office, since both Borzen and the ministry's service and control personnel of this system belong to this category with the colleagues of the IT-system and back-office operation

The whole infrastructure:

- The contact points also provide the office, which, however, is partly financed by the central system
- The IT system (digital reporting, monitoring system) is provided by the center (Borzen).
- the knowledge for the operation (database, good practices, regulation, subsidies, etc.) also is partly provided by the central governance

Key Takeaways

Switching SMEs to green energy is crucial for reducing overall carbon emissions and fostering sustainable economic growth. For the RES contact point, supporting SMEs in transitioning to renewable energy aligns with Slovenia's national goals of increasing renewable energy usage, enhancing energy security, and meeting international climate commitments. By assisting SMEs, the contact point helps:

- diversify energy sources
- reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and
- promote innovation in energy technologies.

The background of the implementation of the initiation was that SMEs:

- didn't know about the subsidies of RES-investments
- didn't know how to access the permissions needed (administrative burdens)
- had a difficulty in navigating in the implementation of the RES-projects

3.7 Best Practice 7 - Slovenia

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The Eco Fund ([Eko sklad](#)) is a key Slovenian institution providing financial support to SMEs (and to other sectors as well as to the private sector) to facilitate the adoption of energy-efficient and renewable energy technologies. Its primary goal is to reduce environmental impact and promote sustainable business practices. The Eco Fund's initiatives align with Slovenia's national strategy for energy transition, focusing on reducing emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and enhancing the sustainability of SME operations across sectors.

Implementation and Key Strategies

The Eco Fund implements support programs tailored to SMEs by offering a combination of grants and low-interest loans for energy-efficient projects and renewable energy installations. The institution provides resources that help SMEs improve building insulation, replace inefficient heating and cooling systems, and install solar panels and other renewable energy technologies. Information on these programs is accessible on the Eco Fund's website, where SMEs can find guidance on eligibility requirements and application procedures.

Collaboration

To effectively promote renewable energy adoption among SMEs, the Eco Fund collaborates with government ministries, local energy agencies, and various stakeholders. The Eco Fund continuously tracks its programs by monitoring the adoption rates, energy savings, and emissions reductions of funded projects. Through workshops and informational resources, it educates SMEs on the benefits and processes involved in transitioning to cleaner energy solutions.

Impact and Risk Management

The Eco Fund's initiatives have generated measurable results in terms of reduced energy costs and lower greenhouse gas emissions for SMEs. Potential risks, such as fluctuating energy prices and changes in regulatory frameworks, are mitigated through flexible funding options and ongoing adjustments to eligibility criteria, ensuring sustained SME participation and alignment with evolving energy policies.

Over the past decade, Eco Fund has supported energy efficiency and environmental projects with approximately 260 M EUR in grants and 280 M EUR in soft loans across

more than 10.000 projects. This funding has predominantly supported sectors such as renewable energy, energy-efficient buildings, and sustainable transport

Eco Fund-supported projects have led to a reduction of around 320,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions and energy savings of approximately 1,380 GWh over recent years. This impact aligns with Slovenia's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable energy practices among SMEs.

In one fiscal year, Eco Fund distributed 62.1M EUR across various sectors, including 41.6M EUR for energy efficiency in residential buildings, nearly 9.4M EUR for electric vehicles and buses, and 335.000 EUR for electric charging stations in Natura 2000 and other protected areas

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

The Eco Fund is committed to building capacity through educational programs for SMEs, providing training on efficient energy use and renewable technologies. Future plans include expanding support programs to cover a wider range of technologies, fostering partnerships with energy solution providers, and exploring digital tools to enhance service delivery and track environmental impact more effectively.

Key Takeaways

The Eco Fund's comprehensive financial support and capacity-building efforts offer a model for promoting renewable energy adoption among SMEs. Key lessons include the importance of adaptable support mechanisms, collaborative engagement, and accessible guidance for businesses. These practices ensure that Eco Fund's initiatives are practical and scalable, making them valuable for replication by other institutions aiming to drive sustainable energy transitions.

3.9 Best Practice 9 - Czech Republic

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

Formed in March 2022, Unie komunitní energetiky (UKEN) is an alliance of experts and local stakeholders dedicated to advancing community-based, renewable energy in the Czech Republic. UKEN aims to create a legislative and economic environment conducive to community



**Unie
komunitní
energetiky**

energy, where local clean energy sources can be a realistic option for municipalities, SMEs, and other community groups. By focusing on building local self-sufficiency and leveraging renewable energy, UKEN seeks to provide solutions to energy, climate, and

social challenges. Their main initiatives include legislative advocacy, subsidy creation, knowledge sharing, and policy integration, all of which aim to establish a safe and sustainable energy future.

Implementation and Key Strategies

Collaboration

UKEN fosters collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, from local governments to energy organizations, with a vision of making renewable energy accessible and practical for Czech communities and SMEs. Working closely with organizations like Frank Bold and Hnutí DUHA, UKEN aims to drive forward models of shared energy use and community energy, including housing-based solar projects and community-owned energy facilities. Through targeted projects, they ensure that community energy initiatives can thrive within a supportive legal and economic framework, pushing for formal integration of community energy into key strategic documents, such as the National Energy and Climate Plan.

Impact and Risk Management

UKEN focuses on providing stable and accessible funding opportunities for energy communities, working to remove financial and legislative barriers to the adoption of renewable energy. For example, they promote subsidy programs that lower the costs of renewable infrastructure for communities, ultimately driving down energy costs for participants. Additionally, UKEN monitors risks such as fluctuating regulations and actively advocates for a consistent legislative framework that can withstand political and economic changes, thereby securing the long-term viability of community energy projects.

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

UKEN offers practical support to its members through knowledge-sharing initiatives, providing tools and guidelines for renewable energy projects. They organize regular training sessions and workshops on topics like energy project implementation, legislative compliance, and technological innovations, fostering a well-informed network capable of overcoming common challenges in the sector. Looking ahead, UKEN plans to expand its influence through partnerships with both public and private entities, working towards new innovations in clean energy and further integration of community energy into the Czech legal system, as mandated by EU guidelines.

Key Takeaways

UKEN's model demonstrates the critical role of local and legislative collaboration in scaling renewable energy adoption among SMEs and communities. By fostering

partnerships, advocating for clear subsidies, and investing in practical, user-friendly resources, UKEN has created a framework that allows community energy initiatives to flourish. Their focus on legislative reform, funding stability, and technical support provides a replicable approach for other regions seeking to enhance energy independence and sustainability.

For further details, visit [UKE's website](#).

3.10 Best Practice 10 - Bulgaria

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev” (URAK) is a state higher education institution, located at the Bulgarian-Romanian border area. It has 8 faculties, 4 of which are engineering ones and more than 8000 students. Some of the subjects are related with the application of renewable energy sources (RES) and energy efficiency. Furthermore, it has a Center for Continuing Education, a Career Development Center, an Entrepreneurship Center, etc.



Photo 1. Rectorate of the University of Ruse

URAK established a training centre in the field of RES two years ago. This training infrastructure is used together with SMEs for education of installers of photovoltaic installations. All trainees in the educational courses are officially certified on a national level by the Bulgarian Sustainable Energy Development Agency. Annually, approximately 200 PV installers receive their certificates.



Photo 2. Practical exercise during the course for installers of photovoltaic installations

Implementation and Key Strategies

Collaboration

The University of Ruse is in collaboration with numerous SMEs, such as SolarMD, EL EOOD, DIKOM, MIK-GREEN, Kinetica Ltd, INTERCAM Ltd, Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Territorial organization of the Scientific-technical specialists - Ruse, Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises - Ruse, etc., which specialize in one or more areas of RES application (delivery, installation, support, consultancy, etc.). Furthermore, URAK has collaborated with many of them in different national and international programmes, such as Romania-Bulgaria Crossborder Cooperation Programme, EEA Norway Grants, Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, etc.

Impact and Risk Management

As a state university, URAK offers theoretical and practical knowledge to the future SME engineers, as well as to the future school teachers, which helps to form the society's attitude and values regarding the green energy transition. In order to achieve this the university has to maintain adequate infrastructure, related to RES technologies. Furthermore, URAK organizes scientific events in collaboration with SMEs, disseminates good practices and guides the students to their future work.

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

URAK provides high quality educational services and maintaining state-of-the-art facilities is of extreme importance. This is achieved using different approaches, such as:

- Participation in national and international projects - one of the research laboratories of the university is „Digital Energy Systems 4.0”, aimed at performing research in the field of RES;

- Soliciting donations from companies - a significant part of the educational and research photovoltaic parks of the university was donated by different SMEs.



Photo 3. Building a facade-integrated photovoltaic installation in progress

Another aspect of capacity building is the maintaining of highly qualified staff. This is achieved by attracting young PhD students and lecturers, participation in research projects in the field of RES, financial stimulation for preparation of scientific publications, etc.

Since 2024 URAK has received the status of a Research university. As such, one of its main research topics is green energy transition and renewable energy sources.

Key Takeaways

Some of the key takeaways, following URAK's experience, are:

- Building of a network of collaborating SMEs in the field of renewable energy applications;
- Exchange of experience between URAK and SMEs is essential for maintain high level of knowledge and practices for both sides;
- Partnerships in European projects increase the capacity building of all parties;
- Multiplication of the results by reusing the same infrastructure in formal education, for information, promotion and research.

3.11 Best Practice 11 - Bosnia and Herzegovina / Republic of Srpska

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The **Ministry of Energy and Mining of the Republic of Srpska (MIER)** has established a comprehensive incentive framework for renewable energy sources (RES), implemented in collaboration with the **Regulatory Commission for Energy of RS (REERS)** and the **Electric Power Company of RS (ERS)**. A core component of this partnership is the **Operator System for Incentive Management**, coordinated through ERS's **Directorate for Incentive System Operations**. This organisational structure, under the Ministry's guidance, ensures consistent and effective support for renewable projects across the Republic of Srpska. The framework includes **feed-in tariffs** and **premium incentive models**, promoting the development of small-scale hydropower plants, solar power plants, and biomass/biogas facilities. Key successes include supporting small hydropower plants (up to 10 MW) and solar power plants (up to 250 kW), which actively contribute to the region's energy mix through the incentive system.

Implementation and Key Strategies

The incentive model in the Republic of Srpska is innovative, combining **guaranteed purchase prices** with a **premium incentive system**. The **structured coordination with the ERS Directorate for Incentive System Operations** allows producers to shift from guaranteed purchase prices to open market sales, receiving premiums when needed to counter market price fluctuations. This innovative approach enhances renewable integration into the market, maintains producer stability, and aligns with market dynamics. This combination of incentives reflects a progressive approach to renewable energy production, demonstrating a clear advancement over traditional fixed-price systems.

Collaboration

MIER maintains strong collaborations with the Regulatory Commission for Energy, ERS, and **local SMEs** involved in RES project development. Coordination with the **ERS Directorate for Incentive System Operations** supports smooth operational workflows and compliance with regulatory standards. Additionally, partnerships with **academic institutions** enhance evaluations and recommendations for emerging renewable energy technologies.

Impact and Risk Management

- **Investment Growth:** With strong ministry leadership and coordinated support from ERS's incentive operations, the new model is expected to drive renewable energy investments, increasing them from approximately 10M EUR to an estimated 15-20M EUR annually.
- **Energy Production:** Renewable energy production should rise, potentially increasing from 100 GWh in 2022 to between 130-150 GWh in the coming years.

- **Emission Reductions:** Expanded renewable energy production could reduce CO₂ emissions by around 20,000 tons annually, given the projected increase in renewable energy output.

Examples of Success

- **Hydropower Plants Supported by Incentives:** Thanks to targeted incentive policies, including feed-in tariffs and premium models, the Republic of Srpska has achieved substantial growth in small hydropower plants. **Currently, 38 small hydropower plants** (up to 10 MW) operate under concession agreements, with a total installed capacity of **110.34 MW**. Additionally, **17 smaller hydropower plants** (under 250 kW) operate without concession agreements, adding **3.71 MW**. These developments reflect the Ministry's success in deploying effective incentives to promote hydropower as a sustainable energy source.
- **Solar Power Installations Fueled by Feed-in Tariffs and Premiums:** The Ministry's incentive policies have played a crucial role in driving the expansion of solar energy. **Currently, 806 small solar power plants** (each up to 250 kW) are operational, achieving a combined capacity of **133.9 MW**. These installations showcase the impact of robust incentive frameworks that support investor confidence and facilitate steady growth in solar power across the Republic of Srpska.
- **Biomass and Biogas Facilities Enabled by Incentive Frameworks:** Incentive models have also supported the development of **4 biomass and biogas facilities** with a total installed capacity of **3.06 MW**. These facilities contribute to energy diversity and resource sustainability by transforming organic waste into renewable energy, demonstrating the effectiveness of policy frameworks in supporting diverse renewable energy sources.

These successes highlight the Ministry's strategic use of incentive policies, including feed-in tariffs and premiums, to stimulate the growth of renewable energy infrastructure in the Republic of Srpska. By working closely with ERS, REERS, and local SMEs, the Ministry has fostered a reliable and expanding renewable energy sector that aligns with both economic and environmental objectives.

Risks and Management

- **Market Price Fluctuations:** Changes in electricity prices can impact profitability. **Regular monitoring and adjustment of premiums by the Directorate for Incentive Operations** ensure that investors' interests remain protected.
- **Regulatory Changes:** Legislative changes could impact the stability of the model. A proactive approach, with MIER fostering continuous dialogue with stakeholders, mitigates these risks.
- **Technological Risks:** Technological advancements may outpace current capacities. MIER encourages ongoing innovation and investments in newer technologies through **subsidies and tax incentives**.

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

Building internal capacity and fostering innovation are central to the Republic of Srpska's renewable energy initiatives. Through training, strategic partnerships, and investment in new technologies, MIER aims to strengthen knowledge-sharing, support operational improvements, and expand the renewable energy landscape in collaboration with ERS.

Key Takeaways

- **Integrated Incentive Management:** With MIER's oversight and structured ERS coordination, the premium system's flexibility balances financial stability with market adaptability.
- **Strong Institutional Support:** MIER's collaboration with the ERS Directorate for Incentive Operations, local SMEs, and academia ensures a streamlined and efficient approach to renewable energy development.
- **Sustainable Impact:** Increased investments, enhanced renewable production, and significant emission reductions highlight the program's success and potential for replication.

The Fund implemented a public competition for the allocation of funds from the budget support of the European Union. This competition was aimed at implementing energy efficiency measures in existing facilities, systems and processes. A special focus was on increasing energy efficiency in micro, small and medium enterprises for 2023. The subject of this competition was the allocation of non-reimbursable financial resources within the Budget Support Package of the EU. The goal is to mitigate the negative consequences of the energy crisis and encourage the energy transition, especially for the benefit of vulnerable households and economies in the Western Balkans.

3.12 Best Practice 12 - Slovakia - SIEA - Slovenská inovačná a energetická agentúra

Overview of Institution and Best Practice

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency was established as a state contributory organisation by Decision of the Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic No. 63/1999 with effect from 1 May 1999.



Agenda of SIEA

- acts as an intermediate body and implementing agency for EU Structural Funds;
- collects and evaluates data on energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources;
- prepares documents for the amendment of energy legislation;
- represents Slovakia in international energy projects;
- provides free energy advice to households, businesses and the public sector;
- operates an energy efficiency monitoring system;

- conducts examinations of specialists in the energy sector;
- Since 2007, it has been fulfilling state tasks in the field of innovation support; it monitors and evaluates innovation activities and proposes measures to support them;
- since 2015, performs the tasks of the Technology Agency in accordance with the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation

Implementation and Key Strategies

Collaboration

- National Energy efficiency monitoring system
- subvention schemes from EU structural funds oriented on the energy efficiency improvements for private and public sector
- Management of Zelená podnikom / Zelená domácnostiam as programmes focused solely on the adoption of RES
- energy audits
- free consulting services, educations and certification of energy auditors

Impact and Risk Management

Zelená domácnostiam (Green households)

In the Green Households project, 107.7M EUR is earmarked for vouchers from European and national sources. Households can apply for support to install heat pumps, photovoltaic panels, solar collectors, biomass boilers and wind turbines.

Zelená podnikom (Green businesses)

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises will be able to obtain a financial contribution of up to 70.000 EUR for the preparation of energy audits and the installation of suitable equipment for the use of renewable energy sources primarily for their own consumption through the upcoming pilot project Green Enterprise.

The installation of heat pumps, solar collectors, photovoltaic panels and wind turbines that do not harm the EU's environmental objectives and comply with the "Do No Significant Harm" (DNSH) rules will be supported. Energy storage will also be encouraged.

The aim of the project is to increase the use of renewable energy sources, taking into account sustainability principles and promoting decentralisation of energy production. So far, more than 66M EUR has been earmarked for the project, of which 22M EUR for companies in the Bratislava municipality and 44M EUR for other regions.

The vouchers will be able to cover 35% of the total eligible expenditure, with the possibility of a 5% rebate in the case of equipment with immediate use of the produced heat, cold or electricity directly at the applicant's site. An additional 5 % will be available for installations with a minimum air pollutant load. The maximum amount of the contribution will be 70.000 EUR per SME. A maximum price per unit of installed capacity will also be set in order to ensure economic use of expenditure.

Both programmes were historically the most successful in terms of money utilised. But the core objections from the applicants/end beneficiaries remain the same. Bureaucracy, high investments required and discrimination is based on the economical development rate of the municipality (Bratislava as well as the rest of Slovakia).

Capacity Building and Future Innovation

One of the known plans is the setup and operations of the regional centres of expertise and support for the topic of RES. Ongoing energy audits, provision of training for new professionals in energy audits as well as the curation of the national Energy efficiency monitoring system makes the SIEA the best candidate for further innovation leader in the field of RES adoption not only among the SME sector.

Key Takeaways

SIEA takes a key role in implementation and monitoring of RES in the Slovak republic together with OKTE. The key problem is the structured and antagonistic approach of ministries and public sector as well as the oligopolised market of the energy production and distribution (TSOs, DSOs and the resellers) that makes it very hard to provide a complex overview of the situation.

SIEA is under the control of Ministry of Economy of the Slovak republic and their activities are regulated by the ÚRSO (Úrad pre reguláciu sieťových odvetví), that harms actually the environment of RES implementation i.e., by raising the costs of initiation the RES resource and connection to the grid, and thus small investors and protects the interest of large investors and privileged political parties and government as such, now elected and under the mandate of organising also this institution.

The Regulatory Office for Network Industries (URSO) is the government regulator in network sectors - electricity, gas, district heating and water management - in Slovakia. The role of the Office is to protect the end consumer from abuse of the dominant position of monopolistic energy and water suppliers and at the same time to ensure the return on investments of business entities, so that the supply of energy and water is reliable and secure.

On the other hand SIEA is the only institution from the public sector that is participating in this project in the full scale. All affected agencies, ministries and organisations, and stakeholders participating in the energy market, were asked to join, but only few responded and just the Ministry of Economy participated in the interviews.

3.13. Best Practice 13 - Slovakia - Obecné obnoviteľné zdroje - Modrovka



Photo 1: PV array installed on rooftop of the local nursery school

Company Overview and Context

The Municipal Renewable Resources Civic Association is the first registered ENERGY COMMUNITY registered in 2024 in Slovakia. The aim is to install 10 kW of photovoltaic panels, including 5 kW battery storage.

The aim of the project is to use the electricity production stored in battery storage at all consumption points of the members of the energy Municipal Renewable Energy Community.

Energy Efficiency Measures

Energy Community Consumption Municipal of renewable resources is at the level of approx. 35 MWh per year. Estimated energy savings because of the self production of electricity for Energy Community sites is expected by 90% .

The installed PV system even covers part of the consumption of the municipal water company, which pumps water into the municipal reservoirs. The municipality offers the generated electricity to the citizens via a virtual battery at a discounted price. Also, all members of the community are able to contribute with their production and thus help the community. During the summer, when the nursery is closed and a great surplus is generated, this amount of electricity is generated to fill the water tanks during the hot days. Also, part of the consumption of the public lighting is from photovoltaics, which will charge the 5 kW battery during the day.

The virtual battery is provided by the supplier, Magna Energia, which has also assumed responsibility for the deviation on behalf of the community. The sharing of electricity between members is provided by the administrator, ECOMUNITA MAGNA, which processes the cost and revenue accounting on a monthly basis. The settlement price is set so that the community can repay the investment itself, for which the administrator has provided the funds. Its amount is derived from the regulated electricity prices for households, which are set annually by the Office for the Protection of Competition.

Resources and Implementation

Overall investment count 22.000 EUR. Out of which 55% of the amount was covered by the internal capacities and expertise and the rest of 45% by grant. Time of implementation was 6 months without administrative burden and preparatory phase.

Outcomes and Impact

The solution is set for a payback period of between 6 and 12 years, depending on electricity prices for the next period. The lifetime of the project is more than 40 years, and the project will benefit community members immediately for a longer time and with increasing benefits.

Anyone can join and take advantage of the shared electricity, so there is a prerequisite, that the community will continue to expand and fulfil its mission and goals to increase direct CO2 savings.

As discussed above, the overall savings count is approx 90% of 35MWh, that is an annual electricity consumption of the Municipality, equal to 31,5 MWh per year .

Challenges, Risks, and Transferability

Sustainability and problems with the TSO / BSO w/ the integration of new energy sources into the grid. The project is transferable and new energy communities are rising in Slovakia, also because of this particular good practice.

4. Summary of Best Practices

The document showcases numerous successful interventions across different regions, highlighting key strategies and lessons learned for supporting SMEs in their transition to renewable energy. Examples such as Germany's Initiative for Energy Efficiency Networks underlines the power of collaboration among businesses. Financial mechanisms like Slovenia's Eco Fund and Slovakia's Green Businesses program show how targeted funding can alleviate cost barriers, and Slovenia's RES contact points simplify administrative challenges. These best practices underscore the importance of an integrated approach - combining financial, technical, and educational support - with strong institutional backing and community involvement.

Ideal Roadmap for Transition

A structured roadmap ensures that SMEs can move towards renewable energy adoption efficiently and sustainably. The process begins with an energy audit to analyze current energy use and pinpoint inefficiencies. This is followed by a tailored plan outlining the steps, technologies, and timelines suited to the SMEs' needs. Institutions should provide SMEs with access to expert advice and practical resources to facilitate informed decision-making. Implementation should proceed in phases, starting with pilot projects to mitigate risks. Once systems are operational, continuous monitoring and optimization are critical for achieving long-term efficiency and maximizing benefits. Scaling renewable energy use across the SMEs' operations should be the final goal, ensuring seamless integration with existing infrastructure.

Main Impediments SMEs Can Face

SMEs often face significant barriers during their energy transition journey. The high initial costs of renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels or wind turbines, deter many businesses. Additionally, a lack of in-house expertise or understanding of renewable energy systems complicates decision-making. Regulatory hurdles, including complex permitting processes and inconsistent policies, further challenge SMEs. Financing is another critical barrier, with many SMEs struggling to secure loans or grants to fund their projects. Finally, integrating renewable systems with existing operations often requires technical adaptation, which can be both costly and time-intensive.

Successful intervention types

Successful interventions focus on addressing the specific needs and challenges of SMEs. Financial incentives, such as subsidized loans or grants, play a pivotal role in lowering cost barriers. Programs like Slovenia's Eco Fund or Austria's klimaaktiv initiative exemplify how well-designed funding mechanisms can drive adoption. Knowledge-sharing networks, such as Germany's energy efficiency networks, empower SMEs by fostering collaboration and peer learning. Advisory services, like Slovenia's RES contact points, provide SMEs with expert guidance and practical solutions. Capacity-building initiatives, including training programs like those at Bulgaria's University of Ruse, ensure that SMEs and their employees are equipped with the necessary skills to implement and sustain renewable energy technologies.

Suggestions for Institutions

Institutions have a critical role in facilitating the transition for SMEs. Policymakers should prioritize simplifying administrative procedures and ensuring clear, consistent regulations that encourage renewable energy adoption. Financial support programs must be accessible, with streamlined application processes and funding designed specifically for SMEs. Centralized hubs, such as Slovenia's RES contact points, can serve as one-stop platforms for resources, advice, and funding. Institutions should also focus on raising awareness through outreach efforts, including workshops, campaigns, and events like Bavaria's Energy Days, which promote public and business engagement. Finally, institutions must establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the progress and impact of renewable energy initiatives, ensuring ongoing support and adaptation to emerging challenges.